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ABSTRACT

To prevent children with reading difficulties from thinking of themselves as failures, academic experiences must include projects that will motivate them to be responsible learners, enhance their self-concept, and reinforce all the language arts skills. One class of sixth grade students with reading disabilities made minibooks from greeting cards as one such activity. The children brought greeting cards from home and chose one that sparked a story idea. To develop the idea, they read the verse, wrote down new vocabulary, and studied the picture carefully, discussing anything unusual or different about it. Those still having difficulty beginning their rough drafts used the five "Ws": who, what, why, when, and where. After completing a rough draft, students met in conference with the teacher, where they read their stories aloud, made changes, and expanded details. Students then constructed books with lined paper cut to fit inside the cards and transcribed their corrected drafts. After practicing reading aloud, they read their stories to a class of students with developmental disabilities. With confidence in their writing and oral reading significantly improved, these students were then able to work one-to-one with the developmentally disabled students to create more minibooks, a venture that proved "enabling" for both groups. (A sample minibook is appended.) (HTH)

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ENable Disabled Readers: Create MINi-Books from Greeting Cards

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ENable Disabled Readers: Create MINi-Books from Greeting Cards

Every teacher faces the challenge of improving self concept of children having difficulty reading. Such students at the middle school level, especially, feel unsure of themselves in other academic areas also since reading is part of every school subject. Reading to learn when they have not mastered learning to read can be very frustrating. These children may think of themselves as failures so their academic experiences must include projects which will motivate them to be responsible learners, enhance their self concept,and reinforce all the language arts skills. This is no small order for the reading specialist whose job is to help both students and other teachers feel good about reading and whose varied duties include working with all levels of reading and all abilities of students.

In my search for a technique that would help my remedial reading students read and write better, I found one that would also make them feel worthwhile. By making mini-books from greeting cards, my students helped schoolmates with developmental disabilities in a self-contained special

needs class program become part of the mainstream of regular education. My less able readers became very able teachers as they taught literacy skills to their peers of the same chronological age but with developmental ages of five or more years behind their sixth grade "teachers."

In the same spirit of sharing and cooperation between myself as reading specialist and the special needs teacher, I no longer felt alone at my job. I also grew to appreciate the effort other learning specialists make to teach all the children to their potential in the basic skills. Thus, the project helped children and adults,too. The understanding and patience that my students and I shared was so valuable that it is hard to measure. I have included the mini-books in the remedial reading program since then.

Mid term happened to be a good time to begin the project but it can be done any time or as many times during the school year as you and the children wish. We had just returned from Christmas vacation and no one objected to putting aside the usual skills work for a while longer. My students loved the idea of writing their own books and the small size was less of a threat to their composing abilities. They had enough confidence to at least attempt the project and were further motivated by my suggestion to share their books with Mrs. R's class and to teach her children how to make them at a time when this particular group of

eight sixth graders would be available to do so.

Our supply of greeting cards had been replenished because students recycled them from home. Instead of throwing away their holiday mail, they brought the beautiful greetings to school and we had a good time rereading the messages and looking for beautiful winter scenes to write about in our books. Each child finally decided on a card and snow falling outside put us in the right mood to begin describing the frozen ponds, the glistening mountaintops, the peaceful white meadows and the quiet cities blanketed in snow. Of course there were a variety of animals pictured on the cards also. Small furry mice, cozy kittens, and birds perched on barren branches always make good "characters" for the stories. Whatever interests the children and sparks a story idea should be the card of their choice. Reading the verse and jotting down new vocabulary will also help to formulate a story as will studying the picture very carefully and discussing anything unusual or different about it.

For most students the words began to flow onto the paper. The ones who were still having problems beginning their rough drafts used the "Five W's" as they looked again at the card.

1. Who or what is this card about?

2. What is happening?

3. Why is it happening?

4. When is it happening?

5. Where is it taking place?

This questioning helped the youngsters get hooked on a beginning and I encouraged them to let their thoughts happen- start to write and continue to write without worrying about spelling, grammar, or punctuation. These sixth graders knew they could cross out, substitute words, erase, or misspell because that is why their first draft is called a "rough" draft. The important thing was to know that any first ideas could always be changed or combined with others later.

After completing a rough draft, each member of the group met individually with me and read the story out loud. During this conferencing time, a student might discover what didn't sound just right and made changes in the text. If the writing rambled on, the child was asked to look again at the picture and refocus on one idea to make the content more coherent. If the story lacked important details, the pupil again referred to the "Five W's" to expand ideas. I might help a pupil revise his or her work by asking the following information:

> Have you answered all of the "Five W's" somehow in your story? What else could you add to make your book better? Do you like the ending? What changes will you make? Why?

Matthew, one of the eight students, especially benefitted from the conferencing time. He thought he could improve his story if he added other people he saw while doing his paper route rather than just mentioning his customers. So, page two of his mini-book was written which was not part of his first draft. The complete and corrected version of THE PAPER ROUTE is xeroxed and attached to this manuscript. All corrections were made with Matthew present so that he would see and understand his errors in grammar, punctuation, and spelling. No attempt was made to revise content without first conferencing.

The other seven students followed the same procedure. While they were waiting for me to conference, proofread, and correct their stories with them, they worked on their individual skills assignments as part of their remedial reading programs, made sketches to go with their writing,or attached the inside pages between the covers of their books.

The size of the greeting card determines the page size. Enough white lined composition paper is folded and measured to fit inside the card to become the final insert of the book. The folded folios may then be stapled or sewn inside the card. Students then cut construction paper or oaktag the same size of the card and glue the paper to the right and left inside covers. Both sides are reinforced and the inside greeting

has been concealed and the outside of the card with the picture serves as the book cover. If writing appears on the front of the card, pupils may wish to cut a strip of construction paper and glue it over the words and print their own title on the strip. They can do this in addition to making a separate title page inside. On Matthew's card of a boy selling newspapers in the city, he printed his own title very neatly with magic marker but colored pencil or crayon can also be used.

The group continued to copy their corrected drafts into the mini-book pages, taking time to carefully check the proper punctuation, capitalization, spelling, and other changes in the text. This near point copying helped all the students to internalize corrections and to practice proofreading skills. The sixth graders also felt a sense of accomplishment because for many of them it had always been difficult to care enough to complete a task. When the mini-books were completed, each student proof read his or her own and then exchanged books with another pupil. Any errors were underlined lightly in pencil so the author could make proper changes. I checked each book also to make sure all corrections had been made in the final form. This part of the project had taken us five sessions of forty-minutes each but the time spent was well worth the effort. Now we were ready to practice reading our stories out loud and then read them to Mrs. R.'s class.

As my students practiced, they made sure their voices were loud and clear with appropriate inflections and pauses. These reluctant readers who rarely felt confident about oral reading, could identify all their own words and read with ease and fluency. When the day arrived for our visit to Mrs. R's class the group felt the excitement of having completed the challenging task of actually writing a book. They were eager to share their accomplishment and the small audience of special needs students were just as excited to welcome visitors to their room.

After each mini-book was shared, every author was applauded. You can imagine the smiles of success on the faces of all my students. We left the books with the class for them to look at more closely and arranged a time when they would visit the Reading Resource Room to return the books and learn the technique of recycling greeting cards into mini-books.

This visit was to be the first one the class would make for academic reasons. These special needs students had been integrated into regular education programs for socialization skills only but had not actually had the experience of learning the basics with their schoolmates. When Mrs. R sent a letter home informing parents of the project, the response was very positive. Any opportunity their children had to enter the educational mainstream was

welcome news.

In order for both groups of students to experience success during the visit,modifications had to be made with the project. I met with Mrs. R and together we determined that my students would use the Language Experience Approach (Lerner 1971) to help her pupils make the books. The latter group were not capable of composing written language on their own but did have limited oral language, speaking by using nouns and verbs and very few adjectives. Their speech patterns were not always coherent and exhibited "telegraphic speech" (Hopper and Naremore 1973). They left out "functions" such as inflections, auxiliary verbs, articles, prepositions, and conjunctions but included high content words. (Hopper and Naremore 1973) They were,however,used to talking about events and pictures and Mrs. R wrote down their ideas and expanded their language as she composed the "Day Story" on the blackboard or chart for them to copy each morning. I would train my students to do the same; so that when they were paired with one of her pupils they would listen to what the child had to say and add to the language by also writing down the very words that were likely to be left out.

The day of the project arrived and as the youngsters filed into the Reading Resource Room they were thrilled to have their very own"teachers." Each pair of students

sat next to each other at desks and together began the process of creating mini-books. Smiles and laughter echoed in the room as the children chose a card from special ones of a more juvenile or humorous nature: a chipmunk hugging a deer, a mouse asleep in a shoe, a puppy on ice skates, and Frosty the Snowman playing with his friends.

And the conversations began. "Tell me about this picture." "Do you like this animal?" "What is he doing?"

One of the sixth graders, Evie, who was paired with James, asked, "What do you see in this picture?"

"I see some buds. I see a squirrel."

"No," Evie interrupted. "That's a chipmunk."

"Oh. I see a chickmunk, " repeated James.

Evie patiently wrote down, "I see some buds. I see a chipmunk"and showed it to James.

"See, chipmunk," she repeated, making sure to pronounce the "p."

"And I don't know what to call it--this," as James pointed to a beautiful little fawn.

"A deer," answered Evie.

And so both youngsters composed. They were as hard at work as all the other pairs of "authors." Like James, the rest of Mrs. R's students were struggling with language and limited vocabularies. But their patient "teachers" would supply the names they needed as they pointed to the partic-

ular pictures of animals, flowers, or objects on the card, pronouncing the words that matched the visual until the ideas were written down in expanded form. Evie reinforced James' oral language and used correct tense and grammar to write the following draft for the mini-book:

I see some buds. I see a chipmunk and a deer. The chipmunk has a back pack on. They are hugging each other. There's a lot of purple and yellow flowers.

Mrs. R and I circulated around the room to check word choices and proper spelling. Much of the vocabulary used was on the primer level and so my students felt confident about spelling the words as they were spoken. Many sight words were reviewed by both groups in this manner.

Now James and the other children were asked to read the draft that had just been written by their "teachers." As sight readers on the primer level, they could identify a few words easily, but were unable to use context clues. James, for instance, could recognize only I, a, see, has, and on, but most of his story consisted of new vocabulary and James needed the visual clues of the picture on the card to decode the new words.

If he hesitated, Evie pointed to the drawing and encouraged James to try to remember the new word. "The chick-munk..."

"No, James. Remember the chimpmunk," suggested Evie;

"The chimpmunk has a what's that? "asked James.

"A back pack," answered Evie as she showed the picture

as well as showing the word that it represented.

These visual associations continued as the students read the dictated drafts. Then they began to copy the stories into their mini-book insert pages by themselves. Because Mrs. R's children had problems with visual sequencing, each letter of the word they were to copy had to be shown separately so a template was used to mark the place and to show only one letter at a time to her students. They did not have the dexterity to form smaller case letters so most of the mini-books are written in uppercase and, if her students were confused on what letter they were copying or how to make it, their tutors were there to help. James' story is xeroxed and attached to this manuscript.

The special needs students did have the eye-hand coordination and fine motor skills to cut and paste the construction paper into their inside covers and to glue their own title strips onto the front if necessary. The thrill of completing this project was a real plus for both groups. The understanding that my students learned will never be measured by standardized tests. Cooperation enabled my "disabled" readers to become responsible people. I'd like to think that this is the first step to becoming responsible readers.

And reading for Mrs. R's youngsters took on a new perspective. They practiced their stories many times before they took their mini-books home. They were able to share their pride with their parents. Theirs, too, was an "enabling" experience.

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The Paper Route

by Matthew

#1 One winter morning when I had to do My Paper route, it was snowing. I had to ~~work~~ walk all around Town. I ~~worked~~ walked ~~bicyle~~ by The church and by The Statue of PAUL REVERE I also ~~worked~~ walked by Some buildings and someone ~~was~~ was in The next apartment ~~and he~~ gave Me 50¢ for The Paper. The ~~snow~~ snow was ~~coming~~ coming down hard.

I saw TWO kids Making a great big snowman. The snowman had TWO STicks for the arMS and TWO eyes, Made out of coal and one carrot for The nose. One Piece of yarn was for the mouth.

p. 2

#2 The snow was getting deeper and deeper by the minute. I had To do Six More buildings. ~~Here IS~~ At a house I gave The Paper TO The Man and he gave Me 50¢. He Said it is TOO cold to be doing A Paper route and he Said ~~go~~ good bye.

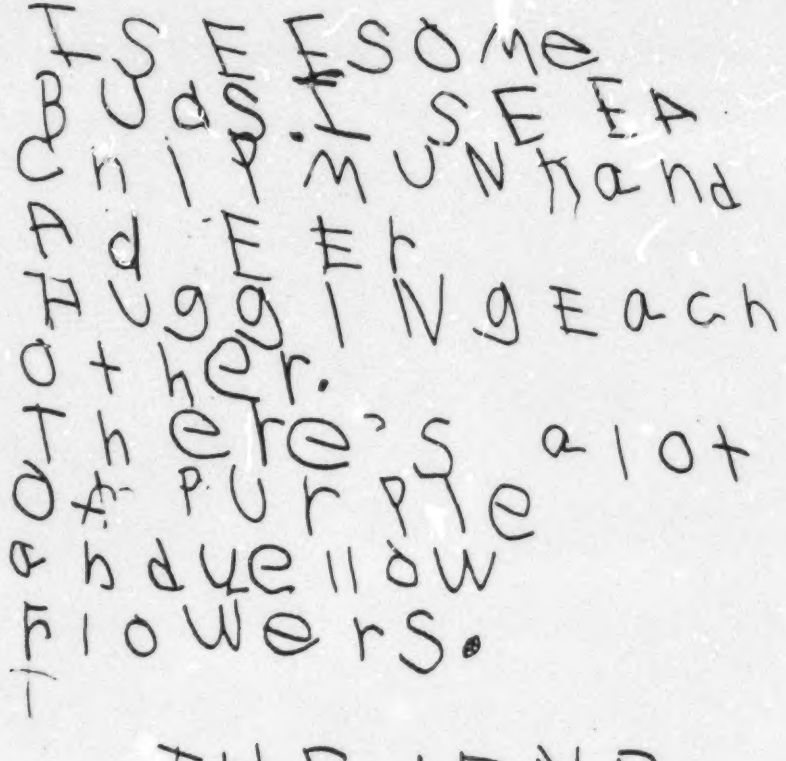
p. 3

#3 ~~I did The rest of The houses and I went home~~ and counted ~~a kerfed~~ ~~Mey Min mning~~ my money ~~and~~ I had $13.00 and I was happy.

p. 4

Just between us...

The chipmunk
and the Deer
by James



THE END